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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7510  
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PN  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BOGOTA 07890

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SUBJECT: THE GUERRILLA SITUATION: PREPARING FOR WAR?  
  
REF: BOGOTA 3997

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. COLOMBIA'S GUERRILLA WAR HAS BEEN QUIESCENT THE LAST FEW WEEKS. THOUGH ARMED CONTACTS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GUERRILLA GROUPS AND THE MILITARY CONTINUE, THE PACE OF MAJOR CONFRONTATIONS HAS SLACKENED. THE MAIN ARENA OF CONFRONTATION HAS BEEN THE MEDIA, WHERE THE UNION PATRIOTICA (UP), POLITICAL FRONT OF THE COLOMBIAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES (FARC), LEVELED CHARGES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST THE MILITARY. COLOMBIA'S GUERRILLA GROUPS ARE IN A RETRENCHMENT PHASE: REGROUPING, FORGING ALLIANCES, AND RETHINKING STRATEGIES. THE GOC CONTINUES TO RESTRUCTURE ITS SECURITY APPARATUS AND TO AUGMENT THE ARMY'S STRENGTH THROUGH RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEER UNITS. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT BOTH SIDES ARE PREPARING FOR AN EVENTUAL BREAKDOWN OF THE PEACE PROCESS AND THE RESUMPTION OF FULL-SCALE CONFLICT. END SUMMARY.

#### GUERRILLAS - THE PUBLIC PROFILE

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¶2. (S/NF) WAVING THE HUMAN RIGHTS BANNER: THE FARC AND THE UNION PATRIOTICA ARE THE ONE COLOMBIAN GUERRILLA GROUPING POSSESSED OF A MEDIA SENSE. IN RECENT WEEKS, THEY HAVE USED THE MEDIA TO MAKE THEIR CASE TO THE COLOMBIAN AND FOREIGN PUBLIC. THE MAJOR THRUST BY THE UP WAS A MAY 8 PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH EX-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JAIME PARDO LEAL CHARGED OVER 100 MILITARY OFFICERS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST UP MEMBERS AND ACTIVISTS (SEE BOGOTA 6456). THE UP'S CHARGES RESULTED IN A SWIFT DENIAL AND A NAME-BY-NAME REBUTTAL BY DEFENSE MINISTER SAMUDIO. PARDO'S THRUST WAS COMPLEMENTED BY REPORTS OF A PARIS PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH UP CONGRESSMAN AND EX-FARC COMANDANTE BRAULIO HERRERA DECLARED THE UP AND THE PEACE PROCESS TO BE IN DANGER OF EXTINCTION FROM ASSAULTS BY THE MILITARY AND MILITARY-SUPPORTED PARA-MILITARY GROUPS (SEE BOGOTA 7001). HERRERA'S PARIS SOJOURN IS PROBABLY THE OPENING PHASE OF A LARGE SCALE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE

COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES. SPECIAL REPORTING INDICATES THAT THE COLOMBIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCC) IS COORDINATING SUCH A CAMPAIGN WITH LEFTIST GROUPS IN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE. THE CAMPAIGN IS TO BE MODELED ON THOSE CONDUCTED AGAINST THE GOVERNMENTS OF EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, AND ARGENTINA. ANALOGY BETWEEN ARGENTINA'S "DIRTY WAR" AND CONTEMPORARY COLOMBIA WILL BE THE KEY THEME. THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE IS TO CONSTRAIN GOC ACTIONS AGAINST ANY GUERRILLA GROUP AND TO FRUSTRATE ATTEMPTS TO SECURE COUNTER-INSURGENCY SUPPORT FROM ABROAD.

13. (U) PARDO ON THE PEACE PROCESS: FOLLOWING ON THE CHARGES OF MILITARY HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, THE CONSERVATIVE WEEKLY "GUION" PUBLISHED AN INTERVIEW WITH PARDO IN ITS MAY 27 EDITION. AFTER THE NOW-RITUAL DECLARATION OF THE UP'S INDEPENDENCE FROM THE FARC, PARDO WENT ON TO DENOUNCE THE BARCO ADMINISTRATION'S CONDUCT OF THE PEACE PROCESS. HE DECLARED THE PROCESS TO BE IN CRISIS BECAUSE THE GOC LACKS THE WILL TO BUILD ON THE BASE CREATED BY THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION. IN PARTICULAR, HE CITED THE GOC'S REFUSAL TO NAME AN INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION COMMISSION AS PROOF OF A LACK OF INTEREST IN PEACE. "THE GOVERNMENT," PARDO CONTINUED, "HAS NOT MOVED A SINGLE FINGER TO PUT AN END TO...ARMED CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT OBSERVING THE TRUCE." HE ALSO CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT CONTENTION THAT THE ARMED FORCES MUST HAVE FREE ACCESS TO ANY PART OF THE COUNTRY. CHALLENGED THAT THE TREATY DID NOT CONCEDE "INDEPENDENT REPUBLICS" TO THE FARC, PARDO COUNTERED THAT "THE FARC NEEDS A GEOGRAPHICAL SITE, A PIECE OF EARTH."

14. (U) A LETTER TO BARCO: THE UP'S EFFORTS WERE COMPLEMENTED BY DESPATCH MAY 10 OF A LETTER FROM THE FARC COMANDANTES TO PRESIDENT BARCO. REVEALING A NEW AGGRESSIVENESS TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT, THE FARC WARNED THAT THE FATE OF THE PEACE PROCESS IS IN BARCO'S HANDS. SIGNIFICANTLY, THE FARC DECLARED THAT THEY DID NOT SIGN A TRUCE WITH "MILITARISM" AND ARE READY TO JOIN "OUR PEOPLE WHEN IT DECIDES TO RISE UP AGAINST MILITARISM." THE FARC'S LETTER CONTAINS AN IMPLICIT THREAT: SHOULD BARCO BECOME "MILITARISTIC" IN THE FARC'S EYES, THE GUERRILLAS WILL HAVE THE LEGAL RIGHT TO ABANDON THE PEACE PROCESS AND RESUME OPERATIONS.

#### GUERRILLAS - BEHIND THE SCENES MANEUVERING

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15. (C/NF) FARC - STIRRING FROM THE NEST: WHILE THE FARC'S PUBLIC ORGANS ARE ENGAGED IN TARRING THEIR GOC/MILITARY OPPONENTS, THE FARC AND COLOMBIA'S OTHER GUERRILLA ARMIES, SINGLY OR IN CONCERT, HAVE BUSIED THEMSELVES WITH REORGANIZATION, ALLIANCES, AND STRATEGIC RETHINKING. AS THE LARGEST GUERRILLA ARMY, AND THE SOLE GROUP REMAINING WITHIN THE PEACE PROCESS, THE FARC'S ACTIVITIES COMMAND THE LION'S SHARE OF INTEREST. RECENT REPORTING SUGGESTS THAT THE FARC IS REDISTRIBUTING FORCES, POSSIBLY WITH AN EYE TO READINESS IN EVENT OF AN OPEN BREAK WITH THE GOC. ONE MILITARY SOURCE REPORTS THAT FIVE ADDITIONAL FARC FRONTS ARE BEING FORMED. IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER THIS PROJECTED EXPANSION REFLECTS ADDITIONAL ARMED STRENGTH, A REDISTRIBUTION OF AVAILABLE STRENGTH TO COUNTER GOC INITIATIVES, OR A RESPONSE TO RIVAL GUERRILLA GROUPS. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE GROWTH IN FARC STRENGTH SINCE THE INCEPTION OF THE PEACE PROCESS, IT FAIR TO ASSUME THAT THE NEW FRONTS REFLECT AUGMENTATION OF THE FARC'S ARMED STRENGTH. BY CONTRAST, OTHER SPECIAL REPORTING SUGGESTS THAT THE FARC IS CONSOLIDATING FRONTS IN ANTICIPATION OF THE MARCH 1988 ELECTIONS. ANOTHER FACET OF THE SITUATION IS A JUNE 2 REPORT IN "EL ESPECTADOR", BOGOTA'S LEADING DAILY, THAT THE FARC IS ABANDONING ITS MOUNTAIN HEADQUARTERS AT LA URIBE AND SHIFTING FORCES TO META AND GUAVIARE DEPARTMENTS. THIS REPORT REMAINS UNCONFIRMED; GOC OFFICIALS PLED IGNORANCE WHEN PRESSED BY THE MEDIA FOR CONFIRMATION. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE FARC WOULD

LEAVE INACCESSIBLE LA URIBE FOR NEW AND UNHARDENED  
QUARTERS. ANY SHIFT OF PERSONNEL FROM LA URIBE MAY IN  
FACT BE TIED TO THE ACTIVATION OF NEW FRONTS.

16. (S/NF) EXTENDING A HAND TO THE EPL: WHILE CONTINUING  
TO SPAR WITH THE GOC ON THE PEACE PROCESS, THE FARC HAS  
NOT ABANDONED ITS HOPES OF DOMINATING COLOMBIA'S  
GUERRILLA MOVEMENT. A MAJOR STEP IN THIS DIRECTION WAS  
THE APRIL 4 AGREEMENT WITH THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY  
(EPL) WHICH CALLED FOR GUERRILLA UNITY, "DEMOCRATIC  
CONVERGENCE" AND POLITICAL SOLUTIONS TO COLOMBIA'S  
PROBLEMS. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING SUGGESTS THAT EACH  
SIDE SEES ADVANTAGES FLOWING FROM THE PACT. THE FARC  
FORESEES A NOMINAL TRUCE BETWEEN THE GOC AND THE EPL  
WHICH WOULD ALLOW INCREASED EPL TO INCREASE POLITICAL  
ACTIVITY IN ITS CORDOBA DEPARTMENT STRONGHOLD -- AN  
ADVANTAGE FOR THE RADICAL LEFT. THEY ALSO VIEW THE PACT  
AS AN INCENTIVE FOR OTHER GUERRILLA GROUPS TO NEGOTIATE  
WITH THE FARC. FOR ITS PART, THE EPL SEES THE AGREEMENT  
AS A MEANS OF LURING THE FARC OUT OF THE PEACE PROCESS.  
THUS, THE AGREEMENT COULD SUCCUMB TO THE DISTRUST AND  
IDEOLOGICAL SQUABBLING THAT HAVE KEPT COLOMBIA'S  
GUERRILLAS DIVIDED.

17. (S/NF) EXTENDING A FIST TO THE ELN: DESPITE SUCCESS  
IN FORGING LINKS TO THE EPL, TENSIONS BETWEEN THE FARC  
AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN) HAVE ESCALATED.  
IN PARTICULAR, THE FARC HAS ACCUSED THE ELN OF MURDERING  
MEMBERS OF THE FARC'S UNION PATRIOTICA (UP) POLITICAL  
FRONT IN ARAUCA INTENDENCY. THE SITUATION MIRRORS THE  
CONFLICTING AMBITIONS OF THE TWO GROUPS IN THAT AREA.  
WHILE THE FARC REMAINS INTENT ON MONOPOLIZING POLITICAL  
POWER IN ARAUCA, AND USING THE AREA AS A RECRUITING  
POOL, THE ELN SEEKS TO DOMINATE THE AREA THROUGH ATTACKS  
ON THE OIL PIPELINE. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING INDICATES  
THAT THE ELN DESIRES A MEETING TO RESOLVE THESE  
PROBLEMS. IT IS UNKNOWN IF SUCH A MEETING OCCURRED, BUT  
NEW DEVELOPMENTS SUGGEST THAT THE FARC AND THE ELN HAVE  
TEMPORARILY SHELVED THEIR DIFFERENCES.

18. (C) ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE: THE NEW DEVELOPMENT  
SUGGESTING A SUBSUMPTION OF FARC-ELN DIFFERENCES IS THE  
GENERAL STRIKE CALLED FOR JUNE 7-9. THIS STRIKE,  
DESIGNED TO PARALYZE SEVEN DEPARTMENTS OF NORTHEASTERN  
COLOMBIA, WAS JOINTLY SPONSORED BY THE FARC, THE  
PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (EPL), THE M-19, THE NATIONAL  
LIBERATION ARMY (ELN), AND THE NEWLY-REACTIVATED RICARDO  
FRANCO FRONT (A DISSIDENT WING OF THE FARC).  
VICE-MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT FERNANDO BOTERO TOLD MISSION  
JUNE 9 THAT THE STRIKE HAS NOT ASSUMED THE DIMENSIONS  
ORIGINALLY FEARED. URBAN WORKERS HAVE LARGELY IGNORED  
CALLS TO TAKE TO THE STREETS. BOTERO ADDED THAT ABOUT  
18,000 CAMPESINOS HAVE BEEN MOBILIZED UNDER DURESS BY  
THE GUERRILLAS, THREATENED WITH A 20,000 PESO FINE OR  
DEATH FOR NON-COMPLIANCE. WHILE SATISFIED THAT THE  
STRIKE'S IMMEDIATE IMPACT IS MINIMAL, BOTERO COMMENTED  
THAT THE EVIDENT GUERRILLA COOPERATION IN FOMENTING THE  
CAMPESINO MARCHES IS DISTURBING (COMMENT: WE SHARE  
BOTERO'S CONCERN; WHATEVER THE SUCCESS OF THE CIVIC  
STRIKE, ITS PLANNING POINTS TOWARD POSSIBLE GREATER  
COOPERATION AMONG THE GUERRILLAS.)

19. (S/NF) M-19 -- THROWING THEIR HAT IN THE RING: THE  
FARC IS NOT ALONE IN RETHINKING ITS POSITION AND IN  
RESTRUCTURING ITS FORCES. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING  
INDICATES THAT THE LONG-UNHEARD-FROM M-19 HAS DECIDED TO  
PARTICIPATE IN THE 1988 MAYORAL ELECTIONS. THE GROUP  
INTENDS TO ACT THROUGH FRONT GROUPS AND TO SEEK  
ALLIANCES WITH MAINSTREAM POLITICIANS AND GROUPS SUCH AS  
THE FARC'S UNION PATRIOTICA. THE FARC/EPL AGREEMENT  
CITED IN PARAGRAPH (6) IS A PRIME MOTIVATION FOR THE  
M-19'S ACTION. IN ADDITION, THE M-19 INTENDS TO FORGE  
CLOSER LINKS WITH THE FARC. AS WITH OTHER  
INTER-GUERRILLA AGREEMENTS, SELF-INTEREST ASSUMES A  
COMMANDING POSITION; THE M-19 HOPES THAT CLOSER  
RELATIONS WITH THE FARC WILL FOSTER JOINT OPERATIONS  
SHOULD THE FARC-GOC TRUCE COLLAPSE. IN OTHER  
DEVELOPMENTS, THE M-19 IS CREATING NEW URBAN TERRORIST

UNITS IN COLOMBIA'S MAJOR CITIES, AND HAS BEGUN JOINT TRAINING WITH THE EPL TO REBUILD ITS DEPLETED STRENGTH ALONG THE CARIBBEAN COAST.

¶10. (S/NF) ELN - PULSO FIRME Y MANO TENDIDA: IN ADDITION, THE ELN IS NEARING COMPLETION OF A MAJOR REORGANIZATION OF ITS BOGOTA UNITS. FORMERLY LARGELY AUTONOMOUS, THESE UNITS WILL NOW BE SUBJECT TO THE ELN'S NATIONAL DIRECTORATE. GIVEN THE ELN'S REPUTATION FOR DISCIPLINE, FUTURE ELN ACTIONS IN BOGOTA MAY SEEK TO HAVE AN IMPACT SIMILAR TO THEIR PIPELINE ATTACKS IN ARAUCA. REGARDING THE PIPELINE, ON JUNE 1, THE ELN PROPOSED TO THE GOC A CESSATION OF PIPELINE ATTACKS, PROVIDED THE GOC MET SEVERAL ELN DEMANDS REGARDING PETROLEUM EXTRACTION AND EXPORT (SEE BOGOTA 7451). THESE DEMANDS WERE ROUNDLY REJECTED BY RECONCILIATION ADVISOR CARLOS OSSA ESCOBAR, WHO DECLARED THAT THE GOC WOULD NOT NEGOTIATE ITS ENERGY POLICY "WITH AN ARMED MINORITY INTENT ON ATTACKING THE NATIONAL PATRIMONY."

#### THE GOVERNMENT - RESTRUCTURING FOR CONFLICT

¶11. (C/NF) MILITARY GROWTH: GUERRILLA EFFORTS AT RESTRUCTURING HAVE THEIR PARALLEL ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. THOUGH PRESIDENT BARCO REITERATED TO VISITING GENERAL GALVIN (SEE BOGOTA 7463) HIS BELIEF THAT HIS REHABILITATION PLAN WILL SAP MUCH OF THE FARC'S STRENGTH, HE REMAINS INTENT ON EXPANDING THE SIZE, MOBILITY, AND PROFESSIONALISM OF THE ARMED FORCES. BARCO BELIEVES (COMMENT: WE AGREE) THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE NOT NOW IN A POSITION TO TAKE ON A FULLY-ACTIVE FARC. HOWEVER, HIS RECENT COMMENTS SUGGEST THAT ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS ARE BRAKING THE PACE OF ARMY EXPANSION. IN A JUNE 2 SPEECH AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY, BARCO STATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD PROVIDE THE "BASIC ELEMENTS" NEEDED BY THE ARMY, BUT ONLY "TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT POSSIBLE." WHATEVER THE REALITY OF BUDGET LIMITATIONS, THE COLOMBIANS HAVE DECIDED TO PURCHASE U.S.-MADE TRANSPORT HELICOPTERS AT A COST OF \$36 MILLION, THOUGH DELIVERY OF THE FIRST UNIT WILL NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL LATE 1987. IN ADDITION, THE ARMY HAS BEEN RECRUITING SOME 2,000 DISCHARGED SOLDIERS FOR SERVICE IN SPECIAL VOLUNTEER COMPANIES. THESE UNITS ARE HIGHLY RATED DUE TO THE MEN'S PRIOR EXPERIENCE, AND HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED IN CONTESTED AREAS SUCH AS CAQUETA DEPARTMENT. RECRUITMENT OF ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER UNITS IS EXPECTED.

¶12. (U) SECURITY RESTRUCTURING: AS A FURTHER STEP IN COMBATTING THE THREAT POSED BY THE GUERRILLAS AND THE EROSION OF PUBLIC ORDER, THE COUNTRY'S PRINCIPAL INTERNAL SECURITY ORGANS HAVE BEGUN MAJOR REORGANIZATIONS. THE NATIONAL POLICE ANNOUNCED JUNE 2 THE ACTIVATION OF 30 INTELLIGENCE "BRIGADES" DESIGNED TO DETECT URBAN ACTIVITIES BY GUERRILLA GROUPS, BE THEY MILITARY OR POLITICAL IN NATURE. FOR ITS PART, THE ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT OF SECURITY (DAS - COLOMBIAN FBI) HAS CREATED THREE NEW COMMANDS DEDICATED TO SECURITY, EXPLOSIVES AND COUNTER-TERRORISM, AS WELL AS INTELLIGENCE CENTERS IN BOGOTA, CALI, MEDELLIN, AND CUCUTA. ACCORDING TO DAS COMMANDER GENERAL MAZA, ALL UNITS ARE DESIGNED TO COUNTER THE WAVE OF CRIMINALITY, TERRORISM, AND ARMED SUBVERSION CONFRONTING COLOMBIA.

#### PROGNOSIS

¶13. (C) AS INDICATED IN MISSION'S LAST ASSESSMENT OF COLOMBIA'S GUERRILLA SITUATION (REFTEL), THE LEVEL OF CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA IS EXPECTED TO GROW DURING 1987. THE STEPS BEING TAKEN BY BOTH THE GOC AND THE VARIOUS GUERRILLA GROUPS REFLECT THAT EXPECTATION. THE ACTIVE GUERRILLA GROUPS APPEAR INTENT ON STRIKING THE GOC ANEW ONCE REDEPLOYMENT AND RETRAINING ARE ACCOMPLISHED. HOWEVER, THE MAJOR DANGER TO COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS AND U.S. INTERESTS HERE LIES IN THE ATTITUDES OF THE FARC. EVOLUTION OF EVENTS, OF COURSE, WILL DEPEND ON HOW THE

FARC FORESEES PROSPECTS OF ITS UNION PATRIOTICA  
POLITICAL FRONT IN THE MARCH 1988 POPULAR ELECTIONS FOR  
MAYORS. CURRENT PROJECTIONS SUGGEST THE UP WILL DO  
FAIRLY WELL IN SOME ISOLATED RURAL AREAS, AND MAY ELECT  
UP TO EIGHTY MAYORS (OUT OF OVER 1,000), ALL IN  
RELATIVELY SMALL TOWNS. BASED ON THIS EXPECTATION, MOST  
OBSERVERS HERE THINK THE FARC WILL BE VERY RELUCTANT TO  
FORMALLY BREAK THE TRUCE BEFORE NEXT MARCH -- ALTHOUGH  
THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE MAY RISE WITHOUT ANY DECLARATION.  
BEFORE OR AFTER MARCH, THE RANGE OF POSSIBLE EVENTS IS  
WIDE: THE FARC IN OPEN WARFARE, OR STILL-NOMINAL  
ADHERENCE TO THE PEACE ACCORDS; THE UP LEAVING THE  
CONGRESS, OR STAYING TO USE IT AS A PLATFORM TO DENOUNCE  
THE GOVERNMENT. BUT IN OUR JUDGEMENT ALL THESE  
SCENARIOS WILL HAVE ONE COMMON FACTOR: HEIGHTENED  
VIOLENCE AND INCREASED THREAT TO COLOMBIA'S INSTITUTIONS  
AND U.S. INTERESTS.

GILLESPIE

=====CABLE ENDS=====